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AUTHOR Miller, Hubert J.
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ABSTRACT

Migrations from 1900-1920 were analyzed, focusing on the overall pattern of Mexican migrations to the United States during the two decades; migrations to Texas, the major recipient of migrants during the period; and migrations into the lower Rio Grande Valley. Data were based on official registrations either entering the United States or leaving Mexico, two previous migration studies using Mexican Secretaria de Gobernacion reports and 1900 census reports, and oral history interviews with migrants into the lower Rio Grande Valley from 1900-1920. Mexican migrations during this period revealed a significant migration trend, especially when about 200,000 "illegal" entries were considered. Economic conditions in Mexico stimulated northward migration which accelerated with the turmoil caused by the 1910 Revolution. As relative stability returned, the limited economic opportunities continued to serve as a push factor. Railroad and agricultural expansion in the Southwest plus industrial occupations with the arrival of World War I acted as pull factors. Although data were incomplete, there was strong evidence to suggest that the Valley received its fair share of migration. South Texas area enjoyed geographic proximity which with the extension of railroad lines into the area and subsequent irrigation and agricultural developments attracted cheap Mexican labor. (NQA)

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MEXICAN MIGRATIONS TO THE U.S., 1900-1920,
WITH A FOCUS ON THE TEXAS LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY



Hubert J. Miller
Department of History
Pan American University
Edinburg, Texas

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MEXICAN MIGRATIONS TO THE U.S., 1900-1920,
WITH A FOCUS ON THE TEXAS LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY*

Publications treating Mexican migrations generally have tended to neglect the period from 1900 to 1920. Frequently, scholars offer a few general remarks on the period to introduce the more attractive period of the 1920's.¹ An exception is Carey McWilliams' general survey of northward Mexican migrations to the U.S. beginning with 1900.² Since the 1960's, Leo Grebler, John Martinez and Lawrence A. Cardoso have raised doubts about this neglect by pointing out significant migrations during these first two decades.³ The silence becomes even more noticeable when one looks for migration studies treating the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

The reasons for the neglect are easy to come by. First of all, there was no accurate record keeping on Mexican immigrations until 1908. Even the records that are available from 1908 on are frequently inadequate and not until 1920 do they become more detailed and meaningful. Secondly, since Mexican migrations prior to the depression years reached their climax in the 1920's, it has made the period much more attractive to scholars. Manuel Gamio's pioneer studies on Mexican migrations are a case in point.

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The analysis of the migrations from 1900-1920 will focus on of three major questions: (a) How many Mexicans migrated to the U.S.? (b) What were the push and pull factors? and (c) Who were the migrants? To answer these questions we need first to look at the overall pattern of Mexican migrations to the U.S. during the two decades. Next, the focus will be on Texas, which was the major recipient of the migrants during the period. The final part of the study will treat migrations into the lower Rio Grande Valley.

Unfortunately the immigration statistics tend to provide overall and state-wide data and therefore do not give the separated data needed for the lower Rio Grande Valley area. To make the task even more difficult, the Valley had no major port of entry as was the case with Laredo and El Paso, where entry figures at these locations are more readily available. Thus migrations into the Valley can, at best, be considered only an educated guess.

Data on Mexican migrations (1900 to 1920) show a sharp rise in the number of migrants with the coming of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Thereafter there is a general increase, with some exceptions, until 1920 as can be seen in the following table. Bear in mind that the figures given below refer only to legal immigrants and those who intended to stay at least a year. The number of "illegal" immigrants is admittedly larger, an aspect that will receive more attention later on.

Number of Mexican Immigrants from 1900-1920⁴

Year:	Number of Mexican Immigrants
1900	237
1901	347
1902	700
1903	528
1904	1,009
1905	2,637
1906	1,997
1907	1,406
1908	6,067
1909	16,251
1910	17,760
1911	18,784
1912	22,001
1913	10,954
1914	13,089
1915	10,993
1916	17,198
1917	16,438
1918	17,602
1919	28,884
1920	51,042

Obviously the U.S. immigration statistics indicate minimal entries. Manuel Gamio, who based his migration studies on the Mexican Secretaría de Gobernación reports, gives a higher emigrant figure.

The Gamio study which begins in 1910, notes 24,203 emigrants for that year whereas the U.S. immigrant figure stands at 18,784. The Mexican scholar also points out a return rate of Mexicans for the same year as 34,696, a number that obviously includes children born to the Mexican residents in the U.S. and Mexican citizens who had migrated into the neighboring republic during previous years. Another case in point is the year 1919 in which 28,844 migrated according to U.S. data but the Mexican figures report a departure rate of 46,080. On the other hand, there are three years within the decade when the Mexican figures are lower than those of the U.S. For instance, the 1915 Mexican data indicate 6,113 Mexican left for the U.S. but the U.S. entry figure shows 10,993. Despite the three years of lower Mexican figures, the overall migration flow shows the Mexican reports to be considerably higher than the U.S. ones, namely, 348,835 to 255,884--a difference of close to 100,000.⁵

Both the U.S. and Mexican data are based on official registration either entering the U.S. or leaving Mexico. The "illegal" entries obviously are not part of these statistics. Neither do the figures do justice to Mexican citizens who entered the country on temporary permits but later decided to stay without becoming U.S. citizens.

The Gamio investigations raise serious questions about the validity of the U.S. immigration reports. The fact that the Mexican government kept track of returnees, whereas the U.S. immigration officials did not, indicates that the former's reports may be more reliable. For instance, Gamio shows that in 1910, 34,696 Mexicans returned to Mexico, a number considerably higher than the Mexican departure data of 24,203. In fact, the number of returnees for the decade outnumbered the departures by more than 100,000; namely, 452,106 to 348,835.⁶ The higher return rate certainly includes children born to Mexican residents in the U.S. In addition, it also shows that a considerable number of Mexicans did not register with the Mexican Secretaría de Gobernación on leaving but did so on their return. Admittedly many of the migrants who returned to Mexico did not make their stay in Mexico permanent but became part of a subsequent migrant stream. The high return rate does raise questions about the picture the U.S. immigration figures present.

A further challenge to both U.S. and Mexican migration data is the question of the "illegal" entries. To determine a more realistic picture of Mexican migrations, Louis Block in a 1929 study utilized census data rather than immigration statistics. According to him 1900 census reports record 103,393 Mexican born residents in the U.S. Taking this figure and adding it to the officially recorded 1901-1910 U.S. entries of Mexican migrants of 41,490, we should arrive at a Mexican born population in the U.S. in 1910 as 144,883. But the census tracks for 1910 record a Mexican born population of 221,915-- a difference of 77,032, which may be classified as "illegal"

7 residents. A note of caution must be exercised in the use of census tracks since they do not include deaths or Mexicans, who during the decade returned to Mexico. On the other hand census tracks under count rather than over count.

Discrepancies between Mexican born residents and legal entries is again evident for the next decade. According to Block the net increase of the Mexican born population from 1911-20 thru excess of immigration over emigration was 152,541. Thus the census track in 1920 should read 152,541 plus 221,915 Mexican born residents in the U.S. in 1910 or 374,456. The actual 1920 census count shows 486,418 Mexican born residents in the U.S. Again there is a difference of 111,962 more than should be expected if only officially recorded entries are considered.⁸ Therefore over the two decade period, we find 188,994 non-officially registered Mexican residents in the U.S. Thus, both the official data and the "illegal" entries show a considerable flow of Mexicans across the border during the first two decades of the current century.⁹

The Block calculation may appear unduely high but it must be remembered that the U.S. was faced with a border nearly 2,000 miles long and generally unguarded. By 1919 there were only 151 immigration officials to man 20 regular border crossings.¹⁰ Therefore undetected border entries could easily become common place.

The extension of Mexican rail lines to the border by the 1880's made the northward migration flow more convenient. Not only was a border crossing an easy task but the growing significance of push and pull factors, about which more will be said

later, aided the migrant stream beginning with the closing
¹¹
 years of the Porfiriato.

Mexican official communications and newspapers during the early years of the 1900's expressed concern over the loss of Mexican citizens to the U.S. A Tamaulipas newspaper in 1904 criticized U.S. labor recruiters, who made all kinds of promises to attract Mexican workers but then failed to deliver when the workers arrived in the U.S. In the same edition, Pedro Argüelles, governor of Tamaulipas, called attention to a federal circular warning Mexican workers about false promises of work made by U.S. railroad companies. The advice of the newspaper and governor was for the laborers to stay at home
¹²
 where their labor was badly needed. Similarly El Imparcial warned citizens not to seek work in the U.S. where they face discrimination, exploitation and trickery. Rather Mexicans should remain at home where their labor was needed. The blunt
¹³
 advise of the newspaper was "no vayáis al norte."

Later on in 1916 and 1918 the same fears over the Mexican northward exodus were voiced. The official newspaper of Tamaulipas urged state officials to do everything in their power to stem the northward tide and seek repatriation of their fellow countrymen. Again there were the familiar complaints of bad treatment of Mexican laborers in the U.S. plus the added omen that these workers were being used as strike breakers and forced
¹⁴
 to enroll in the U.S. army. Although the complaints of government officials and newspapers regarding the bad treatment of their citizens in the U.S. had a ring of truth, these individuals

had little to offer to keep the workers at home. In other words, with few exceptions, there was a refusal to recognize the economic push factors that caused the laborers to leave.¹⁵ These fears over the northward migration add further evidence to the Block estimate of nearly a 200,000 "illegal" migration during the decades of 1900-1920.

Push and pull factors certainly played a major role in the increased migration during the period. Limitations of space permit only a survey of these factors without analyzing the actual operation of the factors in a given region in Mexico or the U.S. Neither can adequate attention be given to determine which of the two factors is more important. General consensus appears to weigh in favor of the push factors but the recent writings of Jorge Bustamante and Vernon Briggs argue otherwise.¹⁶ My oral history interviews with migrants into the lower Rio Grande Valley from 1900-1920 convince me that the push factors, at least in these cases, outweighed the pull factors.¹⁷

The most frequently cited push factors are of an economic nature. Thus, the 1907 recession in Mexico contributed to the sharp rise in the official immigration figures during the subsequent two years.¹⁸ The recession only further aggravated the already bad economic plight of persons who frequently had no land, were unemployed or, if employed, received a very low wage which hardly averaged more than twenty-five cents in the U.S. currency for an unskilled worker.¹⁹ Added to these economic hardships was the modernization program of the Porfiriato which caused a rural to urban migration. The result

was over crowded urban centers and a decrease in the mortality rate. To alleviate these conditions, the Mexican worker sought the proverbial safety valve by fleeing northward.²⁰

A key ingredient in the modernization program was railroad construction. It provided both work and thereby drew Mexican workers to the northern Mexican states. Once completed, the lines became a convenient mode of transportation for the migrants.²¹

Besides economic push factors, there were political factors, which were caused by the dictatorial rule of President Porfirio Díaz and caciquismo.²² The Flores Magón brothers and Francisco Madero are only two examples among many. Although political exiles exercised an influence disproportionate to their number, they obviously were much smaller in number than the Mexican workers who left for economic reasons.²³

The coming of the Revolution of 1910 increased the northward stream. Civil wars made an already bad economic situation worse. The effect of this exodus is evident in the increased migration figures between 1910 to 1912, 17,760 to 22,001 respectively. After 1912, there is a decline in officially registered immigrants to slightly less than 11,000 by 1915. According to Gamio, the decline was caused by the relative stability achieved during the Victoriano Huerta administration.²⁴ The explanation is plausible but a better explanation might be the disruption of railroad services in the northern states where rebel forces controlled railroad lines.²⁵ Furthermore, the explanation does not take into consideration the lack of

pull factors in the U.S. such as bad harvests in a given year.

From 1916 to 1920, U.S. immigration data show a rise from 17,198 to 51,042. Despite the apparent stability that came with the overthrow of the Huerta regime by Venustiano Carranza in 1914, the fact remains there was much revolutionary activity throughout the republic. Two prime examples are Carranza's struggles with the Villista and Zapatista forces. Even the eventual defeat of these two groups did not halt rebel activities against the president. The accounts of the Revista Mexicana, a San Antonio newspaper published by Mexican political exiles, reported continuous uprisings by anti-Carranza factions throughout the republic.²⁶ Undoubtedly many of its reports are overly exaggerated due to wishful thinking, but there is enough evidence to show that the Carranza years from 1914 to 1920 were anything but peaceful. This instability obviously aggravated an already bad economic situation and contributed to an increased migration from 1916 to 1920. Additionally there were some very significant pull factors at work, which will be noted later.

Before concluding our discussion of push factors, a word or two is in order regarding the agrarian problem, which many scholars see as a prime push factor. On the eve of the 1910 Revolution, Mexico had a population that was over 90% landless. One result of the Revolution was the destruction of the hacienda system. Although life on the hacienda for the peon was subsistant living, it did provide minimum livelihood. Without hacienda security, the agriculture worker or tenant farmer had to look to other means for securing a living. Such opportunities

were neither plentiful nor attractive.²⁷ Thus the agrarian problem and revolutionary turmoil were prime contributors to the northward migration during the second decade.

Equally significant in explaining causes for migration are pull factors. Most commonly cited are agricultural expansion and construction of irrigation projects in the Southwest aided by the passage of the Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902. Railroad construction, mine work, and industrial job opportunities created by World War I proved to be additional attractive forces.²⁸ Added to these opportunities were the more attractive salaries when compared to the Mexican wage scale and immigration restrictions which fell most heavily on Orientals and after 1917 on Europeans.²⁹

A key example of a pull factor at work was railroad employment, which placed a high demand on Mexican labor as section hands. Railroad construction in the southwest expanded rapidly during the late 19th century and the beginning of the present one. Immigration and labor statistics reveal that Mexican laborers were quickly replacing European, oriental, and black laborers as section hands. The use of Mexican laborers in railroad work was most evident in the states of New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas. For instance, in Texas the percentage of foreign born workers on railroads was 14.7 in 1900 and rose to 48 by 1920. Since the foreign born population, mostly Mexican, reached nearly 70% or above in these states by 1920, it is only reasonable to assume that the largest foreign railroad workers were Mexicans.³⁰

Immigration studies of the time, such as the one of Victor Clark in 1908, show a bias in favor of Mexican unskilled labor. Commonly given reasons for employment of Mexican laborers was their docility, willingness to work at a cheaper rate, less expensive demands for room and board, and refusal to join labor unions. According to Clark, the chief complaints against Mexican workers was lack of reliability and failure to fulfill labor contracts.³¹ According to one contemporary writer of the time:

The Mexican is a hybrid, Spanish-Indian, more or less characterized by a dogged sort of docility rooted in Indian traits. He is temperamental with regard to employment, likely to change to something new at any moment. For these reasons he is suited for unskilled labor only.³²

Perceptions of this nature regarding the Mexican laborer were undoubtedly no different than the prevailing views of the U.S. general citizenry at the time.

Stereotype observations obviously do not provide a complete or even a true picture of the Mexican migrant. First of all, he was generally a young person. From 1900-1909, roughly 69% were in the age bracket of 14 to 44. Another almost 13% to slightly over 22% were under the age of 14. The figures for 1910-1917 shows even a younger age group. Whereas the 14-44 age bracket constituted 58.5% to 66.7% of the migrants, the below 14 age group accounted for 24% to 30.7% of the Mexicans entering the country.³³ In short, the years 1900 to 1917 reveal an ascending number of younger immigrants crossing the border.

A related phenomenon is the male and female statistics. In 1900 the male migrant constituted 70% but by 1919 the percentage declined to 57% whereas the female entries went from 30% to 43%.³⁴

Relating these figures to the age statistics, we can safely conclude that there was an increase in migration of entire Mexican families with the coming of the Mexican Revolution in 1910.

Not surprising are the statistics on the type of Mexican migrant laborers. Prior to 1910, slightly over 70% were classified as unskilled laborers. Only 17.2% merited the classification of skilled laborers.³⁵ There was a slight increase in these figures when one looks at Mexican labor statistics for 1919. The unskilled labor category reached 78.8% whereas the skilled group stood at 21%.³⁶ Undoubtedly the demands of war time employment helps to explain the later increase, plus the fact that the Mexican Revolution also caused a greater exodus of persons in the skilled and professional categories.³⁷

The two decades of migrations witnessed a majority of the migrants entering Texas. Texas in 1900 garnered 68.7% of the migrants but this figure declined to 51.8% by 1920. The decline in Texas was accompanied by increased migrations to other southwestern states. For instance, California received only 7.8% of the migrations in 1900 but the percentage jumped to 18.2% by 1920. According to Block, Texas was the chief entry point from where the migration spread to other southwestern and northern states.³⁸ In short, a trend was already developing prior to 1920 which became more pronounced in the 1920's.³⁹

Mexican rail connections with U.S. lines to El Paso and Laredo were chief factors in bringing migrants to Texas.

There were other factors at work that attracted Mexican migrants to the Texas area. Among the major pull factors were agricultural expansion, the cotton industry and railroad work. Studies on the Texas labor force as well as railroad work show a migration of Blacks to urban centers. To fill the void Texas employers found Mexican laborer convenient and cheap.⁴⁰ The Literary Digest in 1920 did not overstate the case when it remarked that Mexican migrants put Texas on the map agriculturally.⁴¹ One account of the period described the migration as "the invasion of El Paso". Of concern to this author was the ever increasing number of poor Mexicans who could become public charges that were beyond the resources of the El Paso border community to handle.⁴²

In stark contrast to the general Mexican migration picture were the political exiles, who fled the revolutionary turmoil. Although small in number when compared to overall migration statistics, they were a significant group because of their educational, economic and professional background. This enabled them to publish newspapers such as the San Antonio Revista Mexicana and La Prensa wherein they made their voices heard. The pages of the Revista Mexicana reveal that in Texas, San Antonio, El Paso, Laredo, and the lower Rio Grande Valley served as favorite havens for the refugees.⁴³ The exiles' continuous hope was for a favorable change in Mexican politics and a speedy return to their mother country.

Mexican migration studies tend to concentrate on the Southwest in general or on the individual states in the region. Because of this focus, migrations into the lower Rio Grande Valley

Valley do not merit their deserved attention.

The Valley, encompassing the counties of Hidalgo, Cameron, and Willacy, was an obvious attraction for Mexican migrants due to its proximity to Mexico. Traditionally it was an open border with friends and relatives on both sides of the border. According to the Revista Mexicana, half of the Brownsville inhabitants had friends or relatives in Matamoros.⁴⁴ Oral history interviews with two persons of this period show time and time again that the local residents never saw the Rio Grande as an international boundary line.⁴⁵ The frequent traffic between the Mexican and U.S. sides is seen in Clark's report of 1910 when he observed that there were sixty rowboats operating between Brownsville and Matamoros.⁴⁶ John P. Peavey, a U.S. immigration official, remarked that prior to 1917 there was not a single ranch on the Texas side that did not have a rowboat on the Rio Grande.⁴⁷ Such testimony creates headaches for scholars, who wish to determine an accurate account of migrants into the Valley. Despite the lack of accurate information, all evidence points to heavy migrations into the area during the two decades.

Fortunately county record files do provide some information on Mexican migrants moving into the Valley. For instance, the records on Mexican born citizens who purchased land in Hidalgo County show that the vast majority of this group came from Tamaulipas followed by the states of Nuevo Leon and San Luis Potosi.⁴⁸ This migration origin was due not only to proximity but helped by the completion of the Mexican railroad line from Monterrey to Matamoros in 1905--the same year that the U.S.

line from Corpus Christi to Brownsville was completed.

Many of the push and pull factors discussed previously were at work in Mexican migrations to the south Texas area. A major push factor was the fact that 92.3% of the inhabitants of Tamaulipas were landless, whose subsistent living on the haciendas came to an end with the revolution.⁴⁹ To make matters worse the state had no adequate agricultural industry to provide work, since as late as 1910 only 8% of the land was under cultivation.⁵⁰ Added to this sad state of affairs were the perennial droughts, especially the one of 1913, that only worsened the already existing economic miseries.⁵¹

Low wages on the haciendas served as additional push factors. A going daily wage for an unskilled laborer in Mexico up to 1910 never exceeded 25 cents in U.S. currency. Whereas in the Valley, an unskilled worker could earn from \$1.00 to \$1.50 per day and skilled laborer, from \$2.50 to \$3.00.⁵² In order to halt the exodus, Governor Argüelles admonished the hacendados in 1910 to improve wages and working conditions.⁵³

Another push factor was the end of the zona libre during the latter part of the Díaz administration which caused an economic recession in the Mexican border cities.⁵⁴ The zona libre made Matamoros for all practical purposes a duty free port but once the free zone ended, the border cities were subject to the same high tariffs as other areas of Mexico. Not only did this remove the advantageous competition that the border cities enjoyed over the interior cities, it also discouraged the smuggling of cheaper imported items into the U.S. Now it became more profitable for

U.S. merchants to smuggle goods into Mexico.⁵⁵ The economic recession resulted in a declining population in Matamoros,⁵⁶ which during the free trade zone era enjoyed prosperity. Interviews with two persons who spent their early years in Camargo and Mier, Tamaulipas, provide further testimony of the economic decline of those towns--a decline that has continued down to the present day.⁵⁷

The economic problems of northeastern Mexico did not improve with the coming of the Revolution. If anything the economic picture darkened. Both Octavio García and Esteván García, sons of Tamaulipas ranchers, fled Mexico due to the havoc caused by the Revolution and fear of political persecution.⁵⁸

Many persons, who fled the Revolution and crossed the border, frequently had no intention of making the U.S. their permanent residence. For instance, the capture of Matamoros by the Carranzista Lucio Blanco in 1913 caused some ninety federal troops to flee to Brownsville. Two years later a group of Villistas threatened Matamoros, causing many inhabitants to flee to the Texas side for safety.⁵⁹ In all probability many of these returned to their homes as soon as the danger passed or they may well have become part of the "illegal" alien population.

The Valley like other Texas cities had Mexican political refugees. The Revista Mexicana during the years 1917 and 1918 makes reference to some dozen prominent political exiles residing in the Valley.⁶⁰

Political refugees and proximity to the Mexican border made the area an opportune place for revolutionary plots.⁶¹ One such

incident occurred in 1916 when Basilio Ramos recruited supporters for the Plan de San Diego, only to be captured by Villista supporters in McAllen.⁶²

Whereas El Paso and Laredo became points of entries from where the Mexican migrants left for jobs further inland, the Valley during the early 1900's provided its own pull factors. Evidence of migrations into the south Texas area are already noticeable during the 19th century. Capt. Richard King, who started the King's ranch, in 1854 recruited an entire Tamaulipas village as his ranch hands.⁶³ John Closner, who arrived in Hidalgo County in 1884 and later served as sheriff, reported that when he came to the area there were few Anglos but cheap Mexican labor was plentiful.⁶⁴

The migrations of the 19th century accelerated during the subsequent century when the pull factors became more attractive. Already mentioned was the railroad construction work on the line from Corpus Christi to Brownsville in 1905. Later this line was extended westward to Sam Fordyce, near present day Rio Grande City. The railroad company used mostly Mexican laborers.⁶⁵

The coming of the railroad paved the way for agricultural expansion in citrus and truck farming industries. The growing demand in the U.S. for vegetables and fruits on a year round basis accelerated the expansion. Not only a ready market and convenient transportation but also the expansion of irrigation helped in making the Valley one of the richest agricultural areas in the U.S. The land boom during the first decade of the 1900's provides ample evidence for this phenomenon. Land that was

priced at 25 cents to \$1.00 per acre in 1905 was selling for \$100.00 to \$300.00 per acre by 1910.⁶⁶

While railroads and irrigation contributed to agricultural productivity, the most important contribution came from the work of the Mexican migrant. The ranching industry which had started with the arrival of Spanish colonizers in the 18th century continued to attract Mexican laborers. To prepare the lands for cultivation, "grubbers" were needed, that is, laborers to clear the lands. Irrigation projects required the building and maintenance of canal systems. Citrus and vegetable crops demanded much hand labor. The same held true for work in the sugar cane and cotton fields. Although much of this work was seasonal, the fact remains that Valley agriculture is practically a year around industry. The estimated growing season for these types of crops is anywhere from 315 to 349 days. This takes into consideration that many of the vegetable crops have two growing seasons, normally spring and fall. These labor intensive industries could not have been developed had not the Mexican migrants supplied the labor.⁶⁷

Although there are presently no reliable figures available on the number of migrants who moved into the Valley to take these jobs, we can be sure that many of the Mexican citizens were temporary transients and as such did not register with U.S. border immigration officials. Furthermore, the tradition of an open border did not encourage Mexican migrants to go through the formality of registration, even in cases where they eventually became permanent residents on the Texas side. In fact, it was

not until 1917 that an effort was made to apply immigration restrictions to Mexicans that hitherto had been applied only to overseas immigrants.⁶⁸ One requirement in the immigration restrictions passed in 1917 was a literacy test, which required the immigrant to be able to read thirty to forty words in his/her native language--a task that could easily be mastered while the person waited two or more days at the border crossing.⁶⁹ Out of 15,785 immigrants over the age of sixteen in 1919, only 1,639 failed to meet the requirement.⁷⁰ This is a rather modest sum for the Mexican labor class where illiteracy was widespread. The payment of an \$8.00 head tax, prohibition of contract labor and potential public charges might well have served as greater deterrents but within a year Congress granted exemptions due to wartime labor needs and pressure of employers who wanted cheap Mexican labor.⁷¹ Even if the exemptions had not been granted, there is little doubt about the ineffectiveness of the restrictions to slow down migrations from Mexico. According to one immigration inspector, the only persons, whom he was able to see presecuted for illegal entry, were Europeans aliens, who attempted to enter via Mexico, alien prostitutes, bootleggers or smugglers. "Illegal" Mexican immigrants were merely deported to the other side of the river, only to see them back within a few days.⁷²

Proximity and an easily crossed border should cause healthy skepticism when it comes to reading reports on legally registered immigrants. But there are reliable county records that reveal a migration profile that differs from the pattern evident at the El Paso and Laredo crossings. These records involve immigrant land owners.

There is no question that the usual immigrant coming into the Valley was a laborer just like the ones entering the U.S. at El Paso. Yet according to Hidalgo County land records, 248 Mexican migrants had purchased lands in the county by 1920.⁷³ How significant this number is cannot be determined until there is a clearer picture of the overall migration pattern into the Valley counties.

These same records indicate that the great majority of these migrants came from Tamaulipas, followed by Nuevo Leon, and San Luis Potosi.⁷⁴ It may well be that, as at least two oral history interviews make clear, these persons originally owned lands on both sides of the river and with the outbreak of the Revolution they moved to their U.S. holdings, eventually losing their Mexican property.⁷⁵ Other interviews reveal that many in this group held properties in the aforementioned states and fled Mexico because of the destruction of their holdings. Being property holders, these migrants probably had the necessary cash available to invest in land, which in some cases may not have been more than city lots for their homes and business establishments.⁷⁶ The diversity of these property holders can be seen in their listed occupations covering the years 1900-1930:⁷⁷

<u>Occupations:</u>	<u>Number:</u>
Farmers	75
Laborers	293
Merchants	181
Trades	145
Doctors	2
Teachers	2
Housewives	103
Housekeepers	68

These occupations show a more diverse migration pattern than is usually the case with the over all immigrants entering the U.S. Although the research findings are limited to Hidalgo County and alien owners of property, it may well be that other Valley counties reflect a similar pattern. If the assumption proves correct, we can conclude that the Valley witnessed a greater diversity in the migration profiles than did major points of entry, such as El Paso and Laredo.

The total picture of migrations from Mexico to the U.S. during the first two decades of the current century reveals a significant migration trend, especially when we consider some nearly 200,000 "illegal" entries. Frequently the traditional emphasis on the 1920's fails to take into account the substantial Mexican migration waves beginning during the first decade.⁷⁸

The push factors that are commonly given for the 1920's already were at work during the first two decades. The harsh economic realities in Mexico stimulated a northward migration. This accelerated with the turmoil caused by the Revolution but as relative stability returned, the limited economic opportunities for the Mexicans still served as a push for migration.

On the other side of the coin were pull factors, especially railroad and agricultural expansion in the Southwest plus industrial occupations with the arrival of World War I.

Although data is incomplete, there is strong evidence to suggest that the Valley received its fair share of migration. The south Texas area enjoyed a geographic proximity which with the extension of the railroad lines into the area and the subsequent development of irrigation and agriculture attracted cheap

Mexican labor. Perhaps, the most significant difference during the early 1900's is the diversity of the migrants who came into the Valley especially among migrants who became property owners. This obviously was not a noteworthy trait of migrants entering via El Paso.

Whether the migrant entered El Paso or Hidalgo County, in either case he offered his labor for a wage unattractive at U.S. standards but certainly an attractive pull factor when compared to Mexican wages. In this sense, as was the case with many immigrants, the Mexican migrants provided labor for all types of industries on which many a fortune has been built. In fact, the question may well be asked had there been no Mexican migrant, what would have been the state of agriculture and other industries in the Southwest? If the story of the Valley counties provides any answer, it is that agriculture, ranching and related industries would have been slow in developing had there been no Mexican migrant. Current migrations appear to reenforce this assertion.

ENDNOTES

¹For example, see Manuel Gamio, Mexican Immigration to the U.S. (New York: Dover Publications, 1971). For a review of the literature on the subject, see Arthur F. Corwin, Ed., Immigrant--and Immigrants, Perspectives of Mexican Labor Migration to the United States (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), pp. 3-24 and his "Mexican Emigration History, 1900-1970: Literature and Research," Latin American Research Review 8 (Summer 1973): 3-24.

²Carey McWilliams, North from Mexico (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1968), pp. 162-188.

³Leo Grebler, Mexican Immigration to the U.S.: the Record of its Implications, Advance Report 2, Mexican American Study Project (Los Angeles: University of California, 1966), p. 8; John Martinez, Mexican Emigration to the U.S. 1910-1930 (San Francisco and Saratoga: R and E Research Associates, 1972), pp. 1-14 and Lawrence A. Cardoso, "Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1900-1930: An Analysis of Socio-Economic Causes" (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Connecticut, 1974), 7-92.

⁴Stanley R. Ross, Views Across the Border (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), p. 166.

⁵Manuel Gamio, Quantitative Estimate, Sources and Distribution of Mexican Immigration into the United States (Mexico: Talleres Gráficos Editorial y "Diario Oficial," 1930).

⁶Ibid. Gamio's study of sixty-one case histories of migrants during the 1920's shows that the first-time migrant saw his trip as a temporary stay. There is good reason to believe that this was the general intent prior to 1920, especially when we bear in mind that up to 1918 the vast majority of Mexican immigrants settled within a 250 mile zone of the border. For additional information, see Manuel Gamio, Mexican Immigration to the U.S. and El Inmigrante Mexicano, Notas preliminares de Gilberto Loya sobre la inmigración de mexicanos a los Estados Unidos de 1900 a 1967 (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1969).

⁷Louis Block, "Facts about Mexican Immigration Before and Since the Quota Restrictions Laws," Journal of the American Statistical Association 24 (March 1929): 51. Block's lower immigration for the period, namely, 41,490, than the immigration statistics cited earlier is due to the fact that he subtracted returnees from the immigration figures.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ J. L. Slayden, a former congressman from San Antonio, Texas, believed that during the three last years of the 1910-20 decade 3/4 of the immigrants were "illegal." His hope was to see Mexico return to the "prosperity" and stability of the Porfiriato and thereby deter migrations to the U.S. The Congressman must not have been aware that Mexicans were also leaving during the Porfiriato. See his "Some Observations of Mexican Immigrations," Annals of the American Academy 93 (January 1921): 122.

¹⁰ Joan W. Moore, Mexican Americans (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 39. Also see J. B. Gwin, "Immigration along our Southern Border," Annals of the American Academy 93 (January 1921): 128. Cardoso's figures are even higher than Block's calculation. According to the former, a million and a half crossed the border during the twenty-year period. Cardoso, pp. 61 and 90.

¹¹ The Mexican Liberal Party in 1906 accused the Porfiriato of depopulating Mexico. See Moisés González Navarro, La Colonización en México (México: Talleres de Impresión de Estampillas y Valores, 1960), p. 135.

¹² "Los Traficantes en el Enganche de Trabajadores," El Progresista (Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas) 14 August 1904, pp. 1-2.

¹³ González Navarro, pp. 132-133. For additional information on the worker exodus, see Rubén Guillermo Guzmán Rodríguez, El Exodo de los Trabajadores Mexicanos y su relación con la Reforma Agraria (Mexico: 1963).

¹⁴ Periódico Oficial del Gobierno del Estado Libre y Soberano de Tamaulipas, 11 October 1916 and 20 March 1918. Also see Lawrence A. Cardoso, "Labor Immigrations to the Southwest, 1916-1920: Mexican Attitudes and Policy," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, 79 (April 1976): 400-416.

¹⁵ Adalberto I. Argüelles, Reseña del Estado de Tamaulipas (Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas: Oficina Tipográfica del Gobierno del Estado, 1910), pp. 180-195.

¹⁶ Ross, pp. 187 and 391.

¹⁷ Octavio García, Oral Interviews with Dr. Octavio García. Typed annotated index of a tape-recorded series of interviews

conducted by Hubert J. Miller, Associate Professor of History at Pan American University (Edinburg, Texas: Pan American University, 1976) 34 pp. In the Learning Resource Center, Pan American University, Edinburg, Texas, and Esteban García, Oral Interviews with Esteban García, recorded series of interviews conducted by Hubert J. Miller, Associate Professor of History at Pan American University (Edinburg, Texas: Pan American University, 1978). In the Learning Resource Center, Pan American University, Edinburg, Texas. Also see author's chapter, "The Story of Dr. Octavio García" in Octavio Ballesteros, ed., Preparing Teachers for Bilingual Education: Basic Readings (Washington, D.C.: University Press of the Americas, 1979).

¹⁸ Samuel Bryan, "Mexican Immigrants in the United States," Survey 28 (September 1912): 726-730.

¹⁹ George McBride argues that the agrarian reforms of Porfirio Díaz were a major factor in the Mexican labor exodus. See his The Land Systems of Mexico (New York: American Geographical Society, 1923) and Gwin, pp. 126-130.

²⁰ Moisés González Navarro, Población y Sociedad en México (1900-1970), Vol. 2, serie estudios 42 por Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1974), pp. 150-152. Cardoso cogently argues that economic hardships prior to 1910 were more significant push factors than the Revolution. Cardoso, "Mexican Emigration to the United States . . .," pp. 7-37.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Charles C. Cumberland, "Mexican Revolutionary Movements from Texas, 1906-1912," Southwestern Historical Quarterly 52 (January 1949): 301-324; Peter V. N. Henderson, Mexican Exiles in the Borderlands 1901-13, monograph no. 58 (El Paso, Texas: The Texas Western Press, 1979) and Charles Harris and Louis R. Sadler, "The 1911 Reyes Conspiracy: The Texas Side," Southwestern Historical Quarterly 83 (April 1980): 325-348.

²⁴ Gamio, Quantitative Estimate . . . , pp. 13-14. The decline is even more evident in Gamio's figures based on Mexican emigration data. For instance, the number of emigrants in 1913 stood at 32,826 and declined to 6,113 by 1915.

²⁵ La Prensa (San Antonio, Texas), 24 April 1913, p. 4.

Under the headline, "Empeora la situación en Tamaulipas," the newspaper reported that federal troops were no longer in control of the states and that all communications with the U.S. were cut.

26

For examples see issues of the Revista Mexicana (San Antonio, Texas), 25 March 1917 through 25 January 1920.

27

Martínez, p. 10.

28

Ibid., pp. 1-14.

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Joe West Neal, "The Policy of the U.S., toward Immigration from Mexico" (M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1941), pp. 79-88. Also see U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Results of Admission of Mexican Laborers under Departmental Order for Employment in Agricultural Pursuits," Monthly Labor Review 11 (November 1920): 1095-1097.

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Ruden Fuller, "Occupations of The Mexican Born Population of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, 1900-1920," Journal of the American Statistical Association 23 (March 1928): 64-67.

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Victor S. Clark, "Mexican Labor in the U.S.," Bulletin of Bureau of Labor 17 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1908), pp. 466-522.

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Townes Malcolm Harris, "The Labor Supply in Texas" (M.A. thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 1922), p. 72. Perceptions of a similar nature are also evident in government reports. See Dillingham, Abstracts of Reports of the Immigration Commission, vol. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911), pp. 683-689. Hereafter cited as the Dillingham Report. A brief review of Mexican American labor activities during the two decades reveal a different picture according to Matt S. Meirer and Feliciano Rivera, The Chicanos (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), pp. 168-173.

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Grebler, p. 45.

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Ibid.

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Dillingham Report, p. 101.

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Grebler, p. 48. The large entry of unskilled laborers is

confirmed by an eye witness account. See "Mexican Invaders Relieving our Farm Labor Shortage," Literary Digest 66 (July 1920): 53.

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Leo Grebler, Joan Moore and Ralph Guzmán, The Mexican American People: The Nation's Second-Largest Minority (New York: The Free Press, 1970), pp. 41-65.

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Block, p. 56. Also see José Hernández, "A Demographic Profile of Mexican Immigration to the United States, 1910-1950," Journal of Inter-American Studies 8 (July 1966): 474.

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Ibid., pp. 57-58.

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Harris, pp/ 72-90 passim.

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"Mexican Invaders Relieving Our Farm Labor Shortage," p. 53.

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"The Invasion of El Paso," Survey 36 (July 1916): 380-381.

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Revista Mexicana, 25 March 1917 and 14 July 1918.

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Ibid., 29 September 1918.

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Dr. Octavio García and Estebán García interviews.

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Clark, pp. 466-522.

47

John R. Peavey, Echoes from the Rio Grande (Brownsville, Texas: Springman King Co., 1963), p. 9.

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Edinburg, Texas, Hidalgo County Clerk's Office, Records of Alien Owners, vols. A, 1 and 2. Hereafter cited as ROA.

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Ramón P. de Negri, "The Agrarian Problem," Survey 5 (May 1924): 150.

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Memoria presentada al XIV Congreso del Estado Libre Soberano de Tamaulipas por el Gobernador Constitucional Ingeniero

Alejandro Prieto (Mexico: Imprenta de Ignacio Cumplido, Sucesores, 1889), p.48; McBride, pp. 32-98 passim and Argüelles, pp. 198-201.

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El Progresista, 28 June 1903, pp. 1-2 and Peavey, p. 10.

52

Nathan L. Whetten, Rural Mexico (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 261 and David E. Vassberg, "The Use of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans as an Agricultural Work Force in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas" (M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1966), p. 29. For a comparative analysis of U.S. and Mexican wages, 1900-1920, see Corwin, p. 53.

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Argüelles, pp. 180-195.

54

El Progresista, 16 February 1902, p. 2.

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For a study of the zona libre see Le Roy Graf, "The Economic History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1820-1875" (Ph.D. dissertation Harvard University, 1942).

56

Pan American Review, 1920, Edición especial extraordinaria dedicada al estado de Tamaulipas, Mexico, 3 June 1920, p. 254. The review attributed the decline to the fact that major Mexican and U.S. railroad lines by-passed the Valley and to the decrease of the volume of water carried by the Rio Grande, making the mouth of the river ill suited for a port. It did not find the ending of the zona libre to be a significant factor. Another writer points to yellow fever epidemics as reasons for the sharp decline. See Edwin Foscoe, "Agricultural History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Region," Agricultural History, 8 (1934): 135.

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Octavio García and Estebán García interviews.

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Ibid. A similar story develops in the taped interviews with Eustacio Cantú, Librado Pérez, and Erasmo Cantú Sánchez in the possession of Armando C. Alonzo, a graduate student at Pan American University, Edinburg, Texas.

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For more detailed accounts of rebel activities in Tamaulipas and along the Rio Grande border see Gabriel Saldivar, Historia Compendiada de Tamaulipas (Mexico: Editorial Beatriz de

Silva, 1945) and Gift of the Rio, sponsored by Valley By-Liners (Mission, Texas: Border Kingdom Press, 1975). For a detailed eye witness account of the battle at Matamoros see John C. Rayburn and Virginia Rayburn Kemp, eds., Century of Conflict 1821-1913 (Waco, Texas: Texican Press, 1966), pp. 148-151.

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Revista Mexicana, 25 March 1917 and 14 July 1918.

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As examples see Brownsville Daily Herald, 22 February 1911 and 29 June 1915.

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Charles H. Harris and Louis R. Sadler, "The Plan de San Diego and the Mexican-United States War Crisis of 1916: A Reexamination," Hispanic American Historical Review 58 (August 1978): 381-408.

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Vassberg, p. 26.

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Ibid.

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Ibid., p. 29.

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Ibid., pp. 15-29 passim.

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For a general account of the development of agricultural and railroad industries and the use of Mexican laborers see George O. Coalson, The Development of the Migratory Farm Labor Systems in Texas: 1900-1950 (San Francisco: R & E Research Associates, 1977).

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For a general review of U.S. immigration policies see Marion T. Bennett, American Immigration Policies: A History (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1963).

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Neal, p. 79.

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S.I. Esquivel, "Immigrant from Mexico," The Outlook 125 (Mar 1920): 131.

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Valley newspapers welcomed the news of the suspension of immigration restrictions since it assured an adequate labor supply. See The Brownsville Sentinal, 22 December 1918 and The

Harlingen Star, 26 July 1918. According to the 1918 report of the Commissioner of General Immigration, the labor shortage complaint was exaggerated. Rather it was a case of employers desiring a cheap surplus labor supply. See Neal, p. 84. For a review of the Immigration Act of 1917 and the subsequent exemptions, see Mark Reisler, By the Sweat of Their Brow - Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States 1900-1940 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), pp. 24-48.

⁷²Peavey, p. 187. Peavey's observations are backed up by the Commissioner of General Immigration report of 1917. See Neal, pp. 80-81.

⁷³RAO.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Octavio García and Estebán García taped interviews.

⁷⁶Taped interviews in the possession of Armando C. Alonzo.

⁷⁷RAO. The author wishes to acknowledge the help of Armando C. Alonzo in gathering this information.

⁷⁸According to Cardoso, the exodus was well under way before 1910 and would have continued without the Revolution, which served as an additional circumstance to accelerate the northward migration. Cardoso, "Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1900-1930 . . .," p. 92.